DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 272 952 CS 505 341

AUTHOR Hensley, Wayne E.
TITLE Territoriality in the Ivory Tower: Academic Rank and Office Space.
PUB DATE 86
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Eastern Communication Association (77th, Atlantic City, NJ, April 30-May 3, 1986).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Rank (Professional); College Buildings; *College Faculty; *Facility Utilization Research; Higher Education; *Offices (Facilities); *Organizational Communication; Space Classification; *Space Utilization; Speech Communication

ABSTRACT

A study tested the hypothesis that higher organizational status translates into larger and better office space. One full professor, one associate professor, and one assistant professor for each of 30 departments in a large, mid-Atlantic land grant university were interviewed by organizational communication students. The results did not support the hypothesis, suggesting that academic rank has little or no impact on the size of the office for a professor. The higher the professorial rank, the more input the individual reported having in the choice of an office, but the tangible results of those choices were not readily visible. (HTH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED272952

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Wayne E. Hensley

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Territoriality in the Ivory Tower:

Academic Rank and Office Space

Wayne E. Hensley

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Abstract

Observing that a great many authors endorse the proxemic principle that higher organizational status translates to more and better office space, this study investigated that issue on a college campus. Do full professors have larger offices than associate professors who have larger offices than assistant professors? One randomly selected professor, associate professor and assistant professor were each interviewed from 33 randomly selected university departments. The results indicated no significant differences existed in the amount of square feet allocated to the differing academic ranks. It was concluded that the proxemic status-space principle has definite limits.

Competitively selected paper presented at the Eastern Communication Association Convention, Atlantic City, New Jersey, April 30-May 3, 1986.

CS 505 341

Territoriality in the Ivory Tower: Academic Rank and Office Space

In a field of few truisms, the study of proxemics offers at least one observation agreed upon by most authorities: "Higher status people in a social group have access to more, larger and more desirable locations" (Mehrabian, 1981, pg. 67). Moreover, the principle of organizational prestige leading to larger and more desirable offices is echoed not only by academic sources (Burgoon & Saine, 1973; Cooper, 1979, pg. 57; Huseman, Lahiff, & Hatfield, 1976, pg. 71; Knapp, 1978, pg. 102; Rosenfeld & Civikly, 1976, pg. 182) but in the more popular press as well (Korda, 1975, pp. 64-65; Naifeh & Smith, 1980, pg. 113; Thompson, 1981, pg. 239). In a context familiar to all academics one authority has even written "four or five graduate students can manage in the same size office allotted two faculty members or one department chairman" (Goldhaber, 1983, pg. 192). Clearly, as one progresses up the academic ladder, offices get larger. On the basis of this overwhelming agreement, Goldhaber offers the first principle of territory: *"The higher up you are in the organization, the more and better space you have"* (1983, pg. 192, italics in the original).

Impressive as the evidence appears to be, there is an interesting observation to be made. In none of the cited sources is there a single research footnote. The proof which is offered is advanced on the basis that: (1) everyone else says this principle is true, and (2) I (the author) also say it's true. In essence, the truism of greater office space being associated with organizational status is proof by edict. There appears to be little if any empirical evidence bearing on this specific question.

Moreover, a conceptual problem exists in the literature as well. It is not entirely clear whether proxemic writers are discussing status or power when they refer to territoriality. Is an individual with a "formidable power base" (Knapp, 1978) the same as a person "with higher status" (Huseman, et al., 1978)? To the extent that power or status or some combination of the two is the real correlate of territoriality, the issue is still largely undefined. It is with trepidation then that we address the question: do higher status individuals occupy larger offices than lower status individuals?

In order to address the problem fully we must locate an organization which is accessible for research purposes and one which also has an extremely clear hierarchical order. Fortunately, Goldhaber (1983) has already suggested such an organization, a university. Not only is a university accessible to researchers but the succession of academic ranks is both unambiguous and well understood. Indeed, one may proceed beyond the surface indication of decreasing numbers of persons at each successive academic rank to the average dollar earnings by academic rank--the ultimate hierarchical measure in our society. By that standard, the 1982-83 earnings were $22,056 for assistant professors, $26,921 for associate professors and $35,540 for professors (Chronicle, 1984). Having established that we have

a clear set of monotonically increasing ranks in the organization and that the organization is sufficiently accessible, we may now postulate the specific hypothesis suggested by the rank-space theorem. By that logic, full professors should have larger offices than associate professors who should have larger offices than assistant professors.

Method

The organization chosen for this study was a large land grant mid-Atlantic university of 20,000 plus students and 1,600 plus academic faculty. From the 68 departments of the university, a random sample of 33 departments was chosen. From each of the 33 departments, one full professor, one associate professor and one assistant professor were randomly selected to be interviewed. For data gathering purposes each of the 33 departments was randomly assigned to a student interviewer enrolled in an organizational communication class.

No attempt was made to disguise the general purpose of the study. Each professor was told that the investigation was meant to examine the size and location of office space assigned to faculty.

Procedure

Each student (N = 33) in an organizational communication course was randomly assigned to interview three faculty members from an academic department. Each faculty member was individually contacted to arrange a time for the interview. Without exception, the location of the interview was the professor's office. The interview itself focused on the length of service at the university, the length of time the professor had occupied the office, the circumstances of office assignment and so forth. In addition, the interviewers were instructed to note any status-relevant characteristics of the office, e.g. number of windows, distance from the departmental office, sharing of a telephone, etc.

The location of each office was noted during the interview and the number of square feet of that office was measured from the official blueprints supplied by the university architect.[1]

Results

During the debriefing process with the student interviewers it became clear that the departments of art and music did not have offices in the ordinary sense. In these two instances, the office also served as a studio. Therefore, the offices for these departmental personnel were not comparable to other academic offices. In addition, the department of architecture did not seem to have offices at all. Instead, they operated from "work spaces" in what other academics would probably consider an auditorium size room. For these reasons, these three departments were dropped from the analysis reducing the sample size to 30.

While it may appear obvious, it is probably worth reiterating that the sampling of a trio of professors from each department effectively controls for the problem of differential space allocation to a department. We may safely ignore the issue that some departments have ample space and others are extremely cramped. At issue is how the space available, whether it be large or small, is allocated among faculty members.

The primary hypothesis of this study had proposed that professors would have larger offices than associate professors who would have larger offices than assistant professors. The data do not support this hypothesis (F [2, 87] = 1.75; p is n.s.). The average square footage for an assistant professor's office (N = 30) was 134.97, for an associate professor (N = 30) it was 137.63, and the figure for professors (N = 30) was 154.47. The effect size for this analysis is quite large (f = .44), exceeding the size of those normally found in the behavioral sciences (Cohen, 1977, pg. 284) and the power of the test is a convincing .99 (Cohen, 1977). Hence, these data suggest that academic rank has little or no impact on the size of the office for a professor.

Moreover, the other status symbols which might be expected to relate to academic rank are no more informative. The relationship between rank and distance to the departmental office (r = .09; p is n.s.), being on the same floor of the building as the departmental office (r = .12; p is n.s.), or having a window in the office (r = .15; p is n.s.) are all nonsignificant. However, it should not be concluded that office assignment is a matter of whim in a university. The higher the professorial rank, the more input the individual reported having in the choice of an office (r = .21; $p < .05$). Thus, while offices were being selected by higher ranking persons, the tangible results of those choices are not readily visible.

Discussion

The failure to find a relationship between academic rank and office size could have many causes but one comes to mind immediately. On the whole, universities are rather egalitarian organizations. There is a notable pride taken in objectivity and merit based decision making which pervades higher education. In this equalitarian atmosphere, perhaps it is not surprising that we would find an absence of overt posturing as an organizational norm. This is not to argue that posturing is absent in university settings but office size may be too brazen a measure for an organization accustomed to subtle nuances. By extension, it should not be assumed that these results would extend to other types of organizations. Corporate America may present a very different face than a university. These data may have little to tell us about other situations in different types of organizations.

Another explanation is also a distinct possibility. The university used in this study is currently suffering from a shortage of classroom and office space. In every department, office space is at a premium. Given the

conditions of very limited resources, there may be a "rule of reasonableness" which applies in proxemics. That is, no matter how we might behave with abundant resources, it is unreasonable to assign a full professor to a spacious office while allocating an assistant professor a folding chair in the lobby. If this reasoning is apt, Goldhaber's principle of proxemics may be perfectly accurate if, and only if, the amount of office space is deemed adequate to house the organization.

Finally, of course, it may be argued that a distinct difference in office space is probably observable in comparing the office space of a typical graduate student with that of a university president. That assertion, while it is no doubt accurate, nonetheless demands a qualification to the office space postulate which reads "When we examine extreme status differences in organizations, it is observed that . . . ." No such qualification seems to exist in the literature. Indeed, that lack of qualification is the whole point of this study.

As an aside, it is also possible to offer an oblique consideration of the power-status issue mentioned earlier. Academic rank may not be monotonically related to power in a university department. Power is more likely divided on the basis of those holding tenure vs. those seeking it. On that basis, the offices of full professors should be larger than those of assistant professors. Once again, our analysis reveals no differences.

What we may conclude is that the truism of office space which has been offered for so long by so many has definite limits. While the question of status and office space has suffered from empirical neglect for too long, it is clear that not all high status individuals in all organizations may be identified by office size alone.

Footnotes

[1] I am indebted to the university architect, Warren Kark, for his kind assistance.

References

Burgoon, J. K. & Saine, T. (1973). The unspoken dialogue. Dallas: Houghton Mifflin. Chronicle of Higher Education. (1984, February 8).

Cohen, J. (1977). Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences. New York: Academic Press.

Cooper, K. (1979). Nonverbal communication for business success. New York: Amacom.

Goldhaber, G. M. (1983) Organizational communication. Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown.

Huseman, R. C., Lahiff, J. M., & Hatfield, J. D. (1976) Interpersonal communication in organizations. Boston: Holbrook.

Knapp, M. L., (1978) Nonverbal communication in human interaction. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Korda, M. (1975). Power!: How to get it, how to use it. New York: Random House

Mehrabian, A. (1982). Silent messages. Belmont, California: Wadsworth

Naifeh, S. W., & Smith, G. W. (1980). Moving up in style. New York: St. Martin's

Rosenfeld, L. B., & Civikly, J. M. (1976). With words unspoken. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Thompson, J. (1981). Upward Mobility. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.